









HONEY OUT OF  
✿ THE ROCK ✿



HONEY OUT OF  
THE ROCK & *By*  
BABETTE DEUTSCH



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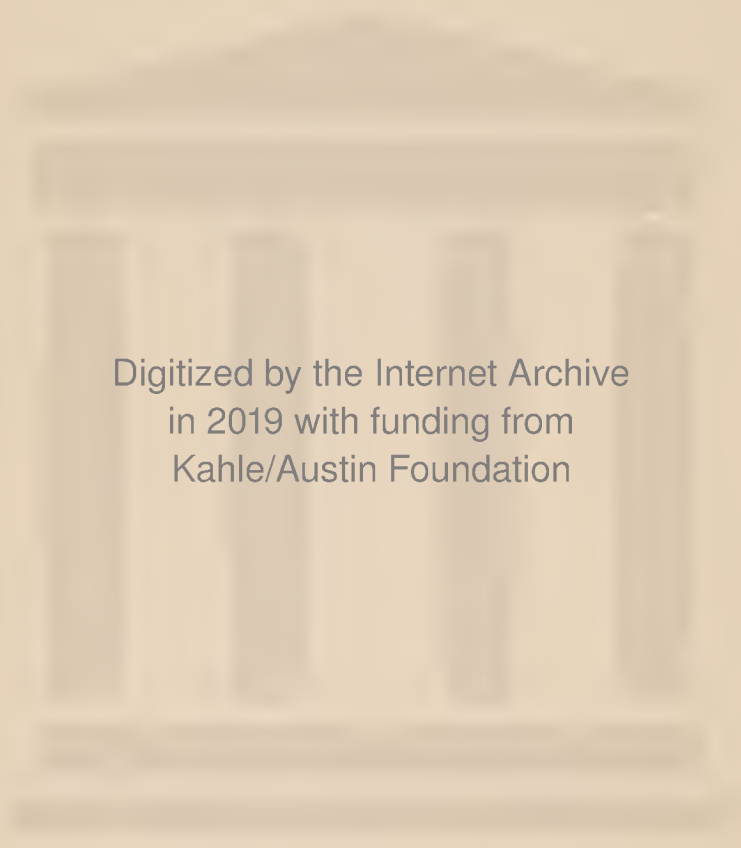
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TO A.

. . . For you have come to be  
To me a thousand gardens, shedding still  
and still: geranium and pine and rose;  
you are the rhythms and the resonance  
of sounding wood, bold brasses and low strings;  
you are the mood that autumn fires rouse;  
you are the warmth of my walled house;  
you are sea-sorrow and the sea-gull's wings;  
and you are in the running of my blood. . . .



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# I. WIND AND IRON



## ON A NIGHT OF RAIN

THE rain drops through the dark, an in-  
visible

Net of music, tangling your thought and my  
thought.

We beat against the scarcely palpable, wavering  
Mesh in vain. Beloved, beloved, we are  
caught.

We must hold fast the unspoken, guarding the  
silence,

Hearing, blown to and fro over it, ever the  
sound

Of thinly woven silvers, hiding the morning,

Hiding our fear and our sorrow, keeping us  
bound.

Softly, steadily swings the intangible shuttle,  
Weaving from you to me, from my heart to  
your heart again.

Whole as the wind is love, immaculate as  
music,

Love that is the lightnings, and the endlessness  
of rain.

## EROS

**L**OVE is the tireless one who tries  
To break through the gates of sense,  
Lidding with holy innocence  
The Beloved's curious eyes;  
Breathing the Beloved's breath:  
Its in-taking and out-going;  
And is the blood, heart-driven, flowing  
Through the warm veins pledged to death.  
Love would link the limbs to find  
The secret texture of their bones;  
Love will quarry till it owns  
Half the mystery of the mind.

Love is one who would take hold  
Of the Beloved like wind and iron ;  
To clasp, to keep, to search and environ  
The body's fire, the spirit's cold.

## IN EVIL WEATHER

**N**OW that the sky darkens and the rain  
comes down

And the blown leaves of July

Lie, yet green, in the street,

I must remember windy nights gone by.

Nights of wintry joy;

Short twilights; frosty afternoons

Walking along the glittering avenue,

With the sun pale and high.

Seeking the shadowed door

Of a gallery. . . .

The gaudy walls, the soft-carpeted floor,

You nudging me with frowning, derisive eyes.

The retreat  
Into some inner room,  
Narrow and still,  
Holding a few stone pieces, jades, a tapestry  
Rough centuries and cunning could not destroy.  
The mirth of a small carving's dignity  
Stiff with a foreign passion  
Touched of earth. . . .

The streets, again, fashionably bright.  
Light dying out over façades converging.  
The bus tops swaying with awkward merriment,  
Leaving the sunset behind, the reckless glowing  
sky.

These  
Deserted for a tea-room. Was it Chinese?



Indifferently dingy, with endless cigarettes

Over endless cups of tea.

Hours of companionable ease,

Verses remembered, and a picture seen

By one :

Allusion tossed like a ball, the clutch at it laugh-  
ing and keen,

The letting it fall between us ;

Knowing so little, yet knowing all.

So going out

Into dusk streets where the cold stars are few.

The buses, huge green dragons,

Cavorting up the avenue

To halt for us, grinning against the wind. . . .

The long rattling ride, the grey night hovering;  
ing;

The dull faces of houses;

The lit faces inside:

Solemn, and painted, remote, and curious.

Park lamps over the black bright river.

But we are blown

Into the street, torn with wind and dark.

Into the doorway. Stumbling into the  
room. . . .

The matchless magic of its solitude,

Only our voices, your eyes, a gesture, cut the  
gloom.

The hour is about us.

Nothing can cover

Silence, louder than sound,

Silence, like love moving.

. . . Now that the sky darkens and the rain  
comes down

I must remember windy nights gone over.

## DARK GATES

O H, strange Beloved, lying there asleep—  
Where do you keep

The thought that answered mine?

The words whereof the night distilled her wine

Wither, unsaid.

And I must drink

A slow and bitter silence in their stead.

Your hidden eyes,

Your hands,

Are secret, changed.

You are a wanderer I do not know,

And all the music of your limbs is dead.

Beloved, is it you? And is your sleep  
A thing to leave love's lovely marble shaken?  
I have called you,  
And you did not awaken.

## AUTUMNAL

**T**HIS is the sad grey weather that you  
like :

The sad frost climbing up the stiffening trees,  
The wind ruffling the water, and the sound  
Of crisping leaves that whisper to the ground,  
And the November sky, profoundly grey,  
Austerer than all these.

The thinning wind and the grey waters make  
A beauty cold as music for your sake.  
And in my heart the music is like waves  
In ignorant tossing over defeated graves.

## HIBERNAL

THE park is winter-plucked. The sky  
and the grey pavement show a sheeted  
face :

the covered stare of one who had to die.

Now, when men sweat,

shoveling muddy snow or heaving ice,

they know the helpless sweat that will not wet  
them twice,

they know the staggering heart, the smothered  
breath

that stand between this knowing and the end.

Though they must drag a net of heavy hours  
about their straining limbs,

though they behold  
love like a pillar of cloud, a pillar of fire—  
this net will break before they tire,  
this cloud, this flame will vanish and be cold.  
Men think of this who limp against the wind  
that freezes hate and sucks at their desire.  
Winter is on us now, and will return :  
soiled snows will choke the city streets again,  
bleak twilights dull the windows as before,  
dark hurrying crowds push towards lit rooms  
in vain.  
One day we shall not kiss or quarrel any more.



## OF RICHES

WHEN we are rich  
we shall build a house on a hill,  
with the eight winds about us,  
and the rains,  
and the whole sky for our orchard,  
with fruits golden and silver,  
and a distant river of thunder.

When we are rich  
our house on the hill shall be stone,  
with a stone hearth, and pine logs  
cracking their fragrance like nuts,  
and pewter like moon and stars

and copper like sun  
for the fire to play on.

When we are rich  
our stone house shall have a room,  
wide, and smelling of cedar,  
with a couch the color of evening  
and soft as flowers to lie on.

And the winds and the rains and the fruits that  
    blow in the orchard  
and the dark and bright of the fire  
shall move beyond us like music  
while two are silent together.

Now we are poor.  
We have no hill and no house.  
Our orchard is hidden from us;

even our fire is borrowed. . . .

Oh, let no one know

how we count our riches (in silence)—

not even God.

## CAPRICCIO

**I** SHALL have pearls blacker than caviare,  
Rubies such as a ripe pomegranate bleeds,  
Gold pale as honey dripping from a star,  
Brought me by slaves like snow and apple-seeds.

I shall have linen smooth as pigeons' throats,  
I shall have purple more than sunset-red,  
The velvet leap of leopards to my boats,  
The fragrance of the cedars to my bed.

I shall have music stronger than the wind  
And sweeter than a Chinese apricot.

In gardens like a translucent melon-rind  
I shall have dreams as sharp as bergamot.

Before my throning presence, emperors  
Will stand abashed as troubled children do.  
I shall not smile though every knee defers,  
But bid them go, bid them bring night, and you.

## MEASURE

**E**VENING has loosed her tides upon my  
breast.

The metal moon, it will not let me rest.

Yet are the ponderous stars a weight more light

Than your still breathing near me in the night.

## CHESS

WE used the square veranda for a deck,  
Holding our books and blankets on  
our knees :

Dusk took the stars in pawn till night said  
check ;

The inland wind was strong with hidden seas.

You were half-stranger and half-friend, the  
same

One finds on shipboard, and our words were  
spray.

Till in your eyes I saw the ancient game

Was done, and I was mated with the day.

## MARRIAGE

**N**OT any more, not ever while I live  
With you, shall I be single or be whole.

A wife is one who cannot cease to give  
Flowers of her body, and graftings from her  
soul.

I came to bud for you like a young tree ;  
And though I should not give you any fruit,  
Here is one orchard where your hands make free.  
Something is always tugging at my root.

Though you abandon what you once found  
sweet,

I shall be like a birch whose bark is torn



By fingers scratching difficult, incomplete  
Confessions of an outlived love and scorn.

And though I wither near you, patiently  
As any bough that any wind can break,  
You will go on having as much of me  
As winter from a stricken limb can take.

You are my winter, as you are my spring.  
However we pretend, this will be true.

You are the wind that makes the leafage sing  
And strips the branches that it quivers through.

## BURDEN

THEY limp through autumn dusk,  
The sad gait slowed;  
They hunger for a husk  
And curse the road.

The moon's delicate tusk  
Pricks like a goad;  
I carry love through the dusk  
And curse the load.

WHERE NO THIEF DRAWETH NEAR

**G**OLD coins encrusted  
With bitter green;  
The spiced brown wrappings  
Of mummied priests;  
Blind steel once trusted  
By a smarting queen;  
The solemn trappings  
Of crusaders' beasts,  
The broken cradle  
Of a dead child;  
A royal charter,  
The "rex" scrawled ill;  
A silver ladle

That earth defiled;  
The shirt of a martyr  
Fire could not kill;  
These on a shelf of  
My lonely mind  
Change not nor perish,  
Always possessed,  
Lasting as self-love,  
And are more kind  
Than you I cherish  
Here on my breast.

## OCTAVE

**T**HE wine that we drank was vinegar,  
Our bread was heavy as stone,  
Yet we sat to eat like friends well met,  
Though each rose, anhungered, alone.  
Then we fed on the roots of bitterness,  
And cracked the nut, despair,  
The husk whereof was cunningly wrought,  
But the kernel too small to share.

## THE GAME

**Y**OUR gaiety is the flash of a thousand  
candles,

The height of a high old chamber, dimly bright :  
Among fine shifting screens of eyes and voices,  
A visible darkness that looms on the sense like  
light.

Is it your wit like a coloured ball between us—  
Tossed and rolling, lifted and swung and  
caught—

Is it your wit or your wisdom that keeps us  
playing,

Still as despair, and livelier than thought?

## SUSTENANCE

**T**HE cherries darken up in the tree,  
The flower of the bee-balm waxes red;  
The sun was a little blind fish in the sea:  
The white-bellied fog is fed.  
  
A wind straddles the cherry-bough,  
The scent is gone from the mint's grey bed.  
And now the firefly comes, and now  
He rises, with his lantern fed.  
  
Beyond black walls lie cherry and mint.  
The longest day of the year is dead.  
My mind gnaws on a sky of flint,  
And so is fed.

## DE SENECTUTE

**W**ILL it be thus when I am old—  
That hands avid as these to shape  
And snatch, will cup themselves to hold  
What will not trouble to escape?  
That a hot heart, indeed the same  
As this, save that its blood is thinned,  
Will turn from turbulent fire to flame  
That is banked low against the wind?  
Will I be quiet, then, and cool  
As streams of lava foamed with snow?  
Or like an unsunned mountain pool  
Which no men drink, since no men know?



## II. TIME'S FUEL



## PORTRAITS

### I

**K**EEN as the breath of frozen fjords  
And poised

Like an adventurous ship with blonde sails  
flying—

Until you smiled with blue, lit eyes:

The sun

Splintered upon an iceberg's shining flanks.

### II

You are as restless as a startled leaf

Tossed in a gale.

Yet you have peace,

When the wind drops you,  
Deep as a deep well, wherever leaning stars  
Stoop to another sky.

### III

Your mind is like a road in some far country  
Where soft-footed dreams,  
Past mountain shrines and thundering water-  
falls,  
Through harsh bright cities, by abandoned  
tombs,  
Pace without destination or regret.  
Yet they are quick and subtle too,  
Being tutored by your thoughts.  
They love to scare the dusk with scarlet robes ;

And plunge, nude maidens, into the midnight  
river.

IV

The wall of fog at the pier's end,  
And the half-risen curtain  
At the ballet,  
The tuning-up of the orchestra,  
And the harsh-throated brunt of revolt,  
You engrossed.  
An ironic observer,  
Or an amateur of sensation?

V

And you, girl lover, how you spread your  
dreams  
Like bloomy plums and pears and lucent grapes

At a fair.

You are an urchin with awed eyes and aston-  
ished laughter

To whom the antiquated show is a bomb of  
delight.

## VI

A rock whereon the sea beats tirelessly

With futile hands

You are.

The patient stone

No tides or storms can stir.

Under your shadow

I remember death

And the remorseless stars who were

Your ancient bright companions in the sky.

Are you no more  
Than an embodied hunger?  
Gnawing still  
At the unanswered riddle.  
You spurn the kingly crumbs,  
Yet you bring bread  
To those who share your spiritual fast.

TO A LADY PAINTED BY HOLBEIN

**Y**OUR arrogance, your stillness, and your  
    grace

Remain, though under sagging stones

Your eyes and hair, your pale, plain, narrow  
    face

Rot with your bones.

Strange, that you breathed for Holbein while  
    he sweated

To draw your moving breast;

Strange, that you're dead and are no more  
    regretted

By those your love addressed.



Meanwhile your painted absent eyes, your quiet  
Preoccupied smooth brow  
Tease men with all that you suppressed of riot  
That cannot rouse you now.

## PORTRAIT OF A MAN

**H**IS worn, brown, grizzle-bearded face  
Looks forth, gravely ironic,—

A portrait out of Sung.

It wears the dim bloom of old ivory

Carved by a master

Whose cunning is forgotten with his name.

Some scholar or some saint,

Whose solitude has been too richly invaded

By engines, ships and gods;

By the dumb threat of sandy empires;

By the ensnaring music of the flesh

Murmuring darkly in his ears;  
By his own thinking's subtle chemistry.  
His looming face  
Suffers the mark of crowded centuries  
Blurred by the large indifference of time.

## AVATARS

**Y**ET I have loved these walls—  
grave with spaced etchings,  
darkened by their books,  
like stones that mellowing mosses climb—  
have loved the furniture  
cherished of time :  
firm contours and old colors, with the flare  
of russet bittersweet in a green bowl  
and the black Persian shawl of my great-  
grandmother  
flung, like her gracious shadow, on this chair.  
Yes, I have loved  
soft rugs, and softer flowers,

the silver and the cedarwood, the purple, the  
fine linen

that is ours.

I have loved things  
more intimately known than men and women,  
things that, beyond the feeble flesh, endure,  
agèd and fine, familiar and secure.

Yes, I have loved. . . .

And now I stand reproved  
by you, who want  
for this bodily tenement  
as temporal a house as some brief tent—  
you, whose sole cedar grows on Lebanon,  
shaking its awful banners like a pæan,  
you, whose sole purple is the dawn adored

above the desert,  
you, whose sole linen  
is the weave abhorred  
that was the loin-cloth of the Galilean.

## HABET ILLA IN ALVO

**T**IME in one spacious room  
Can set her awful mirror, and can stare  
At her reflection like a pregnant woman,  
Big  
With lively doom.  
Oh, she is fair;  
Her centuries of lovers make her vain,  
Though little winds of terror stir her hair,  
Though her quick hands exclaim  
About this monstrous monument to pain.  
Time in one room. . . .  
Here is a tall  
Slim Roman lamp, such as might shine

Upon a sleepy Cæsar.  
There, a water-bottle of grey clay  
Tinctured with earthy dyes,  
Wrought by an Indian with defeated eyes.  
And on a chair, flanked by old books, is flung  
A shawl of camels' hair.  
A spacious room. . . .  
English and Aztec in the gloom  
Are subtly smiling neighbors,  
Egypt . . . Rome. . . .  
Spoils of harsh wars and fruits of sweating  
    labors  
Bear witness to the silent peace of home.  
Weapons and implements of yesterday,  
Suave silk, lithe metal and calm clay,  
Quiet at last,



Belonging with their makers to the past,  
Saving that these are dusted, those are—dust.  
  
Time may be just,  
But what would Pharaoh or the Manchus say?  
  
Time turns away  
From the image that is obdurate in the glass.  
She is a woman, big with child,  
Remembering her lovers, telling  
Herself her pains will pass, always aware  
It is a cripple or an idiot that she may carry  
And must bear.  
  
And now we cry on Time : Be patient yet awhile,  
Awhile be kind,  
Oh, Time, be reconciled.

## OLD WOMEN

OLD women sit, stiffly, mosaics of pain,  
Framed in 'drab doorways looking on  
the dark.

Rarely they rouse to gossip or complain  
As dozing bitches break their dream to bark.  
And then once more they fold their creaking  
bones

In silence, pulled about them like a shawl.  
Their memories : a heap of tumbling stones,  
Once builded stronger than a city wall.  
Sometimes they mend the gaps with twitching  
hand—

Because they see a woman big with child,

Because a wet wind smells of grave-pocked land,  
Because a train wailed, because troops defiled.  
Sometimes old women limp through altered  
streets

Whose hostile houses beat them down to earth;  
Now in their beds they fumble at the sheets  
That once were spread for bridal, once for birth,  
And now are laid for women who are cold  
With difficult plodding and with sitting still.  
Old women, pitying all that age can kill,  
Lie quiet, wondering that they are old.

## DAY LABORERS

C LAYED boots, grimed hands, stained  
faces, eyes

Narrowed from fear or fight or weary guess—

Clogged clothes like earthen armor, strong with  
sweat:

They slump like waiting soldiers, starved on  
lies,

Half fuddled by a potent bitterness.

Death is the frankest foe they will have met.

## MARSEILLAISE

**W**ITH stones in your boots and the  
head of a clod,

Your throat full of mist,

Plod

In a wind with the thrust of a fist.

Plod      plod      plod      plod.

Lie on your belly and bed with the damp,

Rise in the dark.

Tramp

Over streets that are fanged like a shark.

Tramp      tramp      tramp      tramp.

Shiver the bridge and sunder the arch,  
Move like a glacier that threatens the town,  
March  
Till you trample it down.

March      march      march      march.

March like a slow and devouring rust  
On a town, on a land, on a world that is doomed.  
Dust  
Is the portion you shall have consumed.  
MARCH AS YOU MUST.

## PITY

**I** DO not pity the old men, fumbling after  
The golden bird of love, the purple grapes  
of laughter ;

They drank honey once, they fingered the fal-  
con's hood.

I do not pity the old, with ash in their veins for  
blood.

It is the young whom I pity, the young who are  
lovely and cruel,

The young whose lips and limbs are time's  
quick-colored fuel.

Death can comfort the old ; pain, age under-  
stands—

Not the tossed bright head of folly, the soft  
impatient hands.

I do not pity the old men's forgetful tears and  
mirth.

But the young must eat pomegranate seeds in  
the darkness under the earth.



## BALLET SCHOOL

**F**AWNS in the winter wood  
Who feel their horns, and leap,  
Swans whom the bleakening mood  
Of evening stirs from sleep,  
Tall flowers that unfurl  
As a moth, driven, flies,  
Flowers with the breasts of a girl,  
And sea-cold eyes—  
The bare bright mirrors glow  
For their enchanted shapes.  
Each is a flame, and so,  
Like flame, escapes.

## WORDS

T OSSING old capes across old shoulders,  
Sniffing the market's hardier herbs,  
Men of Verona loiter and gossip,  
Laugh and curse on the plaza's kerbs.  
  
Tucking furred chins into furred collars,  
Stamping through grey frost-whetted air,  
Men as hoarse as the crows in the Kremlin  
Grumble and shrug through the snowy square.  
  
Hearing the bells ring in the evening  
Wind, on the temples of Thibet,  
Tired men chew on tales like spices,  
That wipe out grief as they wipe off sweat.

Dusk comes down over roofs and towers,  
Lights leap up in city and tent,  
Men lay words to their hearts for comfort,  
Story and prayer and argument.

Troubling the night along the beaches,  
At the smoking board, in the trampled bed,  
With perishing breath they save the living,  
And clothe with immortal words the dead.

## THE VALLEY OF AIJALON

**I** HAVE forgotten precious things :  
Wisdom in books, the words of lovers,  
But not the shadow on the waters  
Cast by a hidden sea-gull's wings.

I have forgotten many a pledge  
Given and taken—fears and hunger—  
That once were knives—but not the pewter  
Of olives from a mountain's edge.

The tired brain gathers and lets go  
Faces and cities, wars and weathers,  
But keeps one sun as still as Joshua's  
On honey-bright unbroken snow.

## MYTH

**L**IKE twanging jew's harps, snug cicadas  
Hymn nasally the summer sun.

Their indolent god with drowsy fingers  
Strokes the shrill valleys, one by one.

The sun has filled his happy nostrils  
With scent, and pricked his golden ears,  
From his immortal limbs, like water,  
Shaking earth's follies and its fears.

## RITUAL

UPON the slope the trees are praying  
Like pagan priests with unbent knees;  
From the wide, roofless temple wanders  
The voice of their rough litanies.  
  
Dusk enters—a young boy with candles;  
Soon the midsummer god will rise,  
Black as a warm-breathed bull, where falling  
Stars melt like wax before his eyes.

## INDIAN SUMMER

**S**ILENT as moving shadow, Indian summer  
Comes down the mountains as it ever  
came,

Breathing once more the forests' kindled  
incense,

Lighting the waters with a sombre flame.

Now in the burdened, apple-scented orchards  
The hours like resting herds drink up the sun.  
Night presses upon twilight like a lover—  
A little while she struggles, and has done.

Now earth broods darkly as a pregnant mother  
Whose heart is hushed to hear a new heart beat;  
And to behold the yet ungathered harvest  
Some man may stay his graveward-hurrying  
feet.



## SEPTEMBER

**T**HIS is the month when sun and wind  
contend

For the possession of that lapis, thinned  
To wannest opal, that is pure bare sky.  
A cloud-puff is a milk-weed soberly  
Shredded by breezes with the fists of boys.  
Only to breathe the air is to grow wise  
On a transparent liquor, to grow still  
As are the humped ruminant herds who kneel  
On the horizon as against a wall—  
The hornless cattle without barn or bell.  
A butterfly drifts down but makes no sound,  
To prove it is no leaf of sudden brown

Whisking along the floor. The boughs, the  
turf,

Hug their thick green as though it were a scarf  
Against adventuring chill. And few and small  
The russet tongues of the barberry thrill

The hairy verdure with the tinge of fire.

Now apple-seeds grow black, and seeds of pear ;

Now the grapes tighten ; meadows shake like  
seas,

And rivers are more level than the fields.

Shadows lie late, their long and drowsy limbs

Spread on the grass ; and before dusk the winds

Cease, with all noises, save the cricket's din ;

And death's asleep, and we'll not waken him.

## FALL FANTASIA

**B**ANNERS of sunset flung  
Like petals from a vast chrysanthemum,

Upon the procession of autumn,  
Across the pageant of dusk.

The black flower of the streets  
Opens its white-stamened heart.

The fingers of evening are tearing the leaves of  
the flower,

The fingers of evening are forcing  
The wide, dark petals apart.

The odor of burning gardens  
Rises upon the wind.

The nervous night comes on, stripping the sky  
of crimson.

The stone forests grow quiet,  
Their boughs are thinned.

The air is like hurrying blood  
In the veins of night.

Music goes by like a king who rides to his  
desire.

Autumn, naked and proud, goes to his bride.

Now he knows her—Death,  
In broken jewels of fire.

## PRAYER TO THE WIND

THE shadow of trees is the toss of the  
wind's wide garment,

The river-foam is the wake of his naked stride.

He will pluck the sun from the sky to crumble  
and scatter,

For the magpie night to discover and snatch and  
hide.

His hands are strong to shake the seas or the  
jungle.

He leads the wild goose home, stamps aircraft  
under his feet;

He brings the lion to kill, he cheats the bee of  
honey;

He wipes the sour smell of poverty out of the  
street.

Oh, Wind, whose lips can whistle the snow from  
the mountains,

Who clashes the leaves like brass when summer  
is high and bright,

Who treads the autumn fires, whose voice is the  
surf of heaven,

Will you save us at last and lift us above  
delight?

Can you not strike at our shames as you strike  
death from the forests,

Nor fill the spirit of man as you fill his thou-  
sand sails?

You know with the hands of the blind his cairns  
and his cities;

If your touch avail not to move him, what shall  
he feel that avails?

## THE YOUNG MAN REMEMBERS

**I** BEGIN to know you now, old man,  
with your speech of sighs and old chants,  
with your restless hands of veined ivory,  
and your thin body, full of pains and patience.  
I remember your voice intoning  
the ancient sorrowful music  
when you carried the psalms to the end.  
Sorrow was your companion: you could talk  
to her simply.  
Now you break your phrases:  
her understanding mends them.  
I remember your hands on a harvest  
busy about the grapes,



holding them like clusters of colored gold,  
your hands, lifting and sorting.

Now they are empty.

Your fingers page a paper, comb your beard.

Your hands seek each other,  
having nothing to cherish.

My heart is twisted, remembering those poor  
people :

my father and mother,  
working in candled gloaming—  
caught in a tangle of children,  
so clamorous and so little :

you heard their voluble troubles, and trouble  
that knows no voicing.

When I was a child

I took you like bread,

I heard you like Sabbath prayers,  
I saw you like night and morning,  
you, my father.

But now

the forty years between us are a bridge  
that I cross

to meet an old man.

He does not see me coming

as he sits,

plucking at his beard as one plucks at the sleeve  
of a friend.

“REJOICE NOT, O PHILISTIA, ALL  
OF THEE. . . .”

WHEN on lovely London  
The Great Plague came down  
With the dumb jaws of locusts  
To devour the town,  
The lord shook in his velvet  
Like the girl in her nightgown.

And fevered men ran naked  
Crying through the street,  
“The plague! Repent!” And then, “The  
plague!”

With breath like leaping heat;

The neighbors pulled their shutters  
To dull the stintless bleat.

The clerk among his candles,  
The peasant in his shed,  
Never looked for morning  
When he went to bed,  
Often looked for burial,  
Alive or dead.

There was no peace in Canterbury,  
There was none in Rome,  
When the plague rode Europe  
As a starved knight rides home  
From wars that are unending  
Through fields as thin as foam.

The towns were torn with ditches  
Like men in garments rent.  
Lovers and fathers and beggars  
Because their tears were spent  
Laughed at the dry-lipped crying,  
“Repent! Repent! Repent!”

Thank God now London’s quiet,  
In Paris or in Prague  
Who would now remember  
A nightmare, awful and vague,  
Of a naked man, running, running,  
Whose whisper is, “*The Plague!*”

## MAARIV

**H**E faced the darkening window as he  
stood

to say the evening prayer.

And those who moved about him there,

the strangers, who were all his own,

giving him neither scorn nor care,

left him the more alone.

His old eyes

echoed the dimming skies. His fingers

fluttered, as though he sought

to catch the faded fringes of his thought,

and find a feeble warmth for aching bones

in words of praise

like sunset drowning in autumnal haze.

A feeble patriarch in a thin old coat,

drawing about him like a sacred shawl

the comfort of his ancient ritual,

he stays

to mark the close of one more meager day.

Habit as blind and steady as the tide

masters his muttering lips, his eyes that brood

upon this dusk that falls on a new loss

and seems familiar since it, too, will pass. . . .

The dark grew bold

as the old man, from his security of solitude,

turned to the world, and sighed.

## THE DEATH OF SARAH

**Genesis** xxiii, 2: And Sarah died in Kiriath-arba (the same is Hebron), in the land of Canaan: and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her.

**A**BRAHAM stood by Sarah's bed;  
She made no sign, the woman was dead.

He looked on her peace, un comforted.

The bride of his youth, he had sought no other,  
She had lived in his tent and called him  
"brother,"

Sarah, the mistress of Ishmael's mother.

The fire and the knife had made Abraham grim;  
His eyes were dry now, dry and dim.  
His sons and his herds were left to him.



In the land of Canaan were pastures and  
mangers,

His flocks were safe from the desert rangers.  
And his wife lay dead in a land of strangers.

He had camels and cattle and silver and gold,  
His slaves and his chattels were manifold.  
He was widowed and stricken, widowed and  
old.

From the side of his wife he rose up slowly,  
The Lord would make her strange grave holy;  
The mighty prince had the tongue of the lowly.

In the land of Canaan a sojourner,  
He must ask of Canaan a sepulchre.  
Out of his sight he must bury her.

He was one to love the Lord and fear Him;  
The Lord was his shepherd, the Lord could  
shear him.

And the Lord would bid the people hear him.

In the field of Ephron he knew a cave;  
He spoke for it to be Sarah's grave.  
The children of Heth hearkened and gave.

And Sarah was buried in all the pride her  
Spouse had not in her life denied her;  
In that field, in that cave he would lie beside  
her.

Abraham drew a sighing breath  
For the land that he had of the children of  
Heth  
To be his forever, his in death.

He had seen the seed that the Lord would  
quicken,

He was blessed of the Lord and his enemies  
stricken—

And he had seen Sarah age and sicken.

Abraham fondled his camel's ears

Where it knelt by the cave. He had no tears.

He gave thanks to the Lord, he was full of  
years.

## THE PLEDGE OF BENJAMIN

Genesis xliii, 2: And their father Israel said unto them, If it be so now, do this: take of the choice fruits of the land in your vessels, and carry down the man a present . . . take also your brother. . . . And if I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.

**I** SRAEL spoke, in his voice a burr :  
“Why should Pharaoh’s steward prefer  
My little last lamb, my bundle of myrrh?”

The sons of Israel stood around him,  
They were nine strong fighters to confound  
him,  
And the hunger of Benjamin smote him and  
bound him.

“If I bring him not back,” so Reuben spoke,

“You shall put my two sons under the yoke.”

Israel covered his eyes with his cloak.

“If I bring him not back,” said Judah, “never  
May the strength of my enemies fail or sever;  
Let the blame be on my head forever.”

Remembering Joseph, whom Rachel bore,  
Israel heard what the brothers swore;  
On a child of Rachel’s he looked once more.

“My lamb, my foal, my bundle of spices!  
The steward of Pharaoh knows many devices—  
Lord, bless Thou my sacrifices.”

Jacob was shaken, Jacob was old;  
He filled their sacks with presents and gold  
That Pharaoh’s steward might smile to behold.

He weighted their asses down with treasure,  
With myrrh and spice for the steward's  
pleasure.

His cup of grief was a running measure.

Judah was calm with a lion's calm;  
He took the gifts of honey and balm,  
And Benjamin's hand was in Judah's palm.

He was the last-born of his mother,  
He went with the nine, even as that other;  
Would he return—the little brother?

The last store of the corn was spent.  
Israel watched them from his tent,  
The heart out of his breast he had sent.

Down to Egypt he watched them going,

The swaying asses, the white robes flowing;  
His eyes stung with the hot wind blowing.

Why should Pharaoh's steward prefer  
His foal, his lamb, his bundle of myrrh?  
He heard Leah's voice, he went in to her.

## THE MEETING OF JACOB AND JOSEPH (Apocryphal)

**Genesis** xlviii, 29: And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father to Goshen; and he presented himself unto him, and fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while.

**A**ND Israel fell upon Judah's words  
That filled him even as cakes and curds,  
That were more precious than flocks and herds.

He had fed his heart to sorrows like dragons,  
But now he was stayed by stintless flagons,  
He would journey to Joseph in Pharaoh's  
    wagons.

And Israel said, "If ye do not lie,  
Joseph, my son, the light of my eye,  
I shall hold in these arms before I die."



He sent forth his household, child and chattel,  
His sons and his sons' sons, his camels and  
cattle,

Armored with pride as an host for battle.

He left Canaan behind like a broken shard.  
Was the way into Egypt heavy and hard?  
The dust in his nostrils was sweet as nard.

The Lord's voice lacked not, to make him  
gladder;

His fear was flat as a broken bladder.  
Had his dream not mounted the angels' ladder?

Out of Beersheba Israel rode;  
He would reap, even as he had sowed.  
The heart beat in his side like a goad.

Israel came to the land of Goshen.

The joy he had drunk was a dizzy potion.

Joseph was come at his father's motion.

The father waited. His son was slow.

Joseph saw where he stood, but he did not go.

"I am not he whom Jacob will know."

Benjamin leapt when his brother beckoned :

"You are the boy on whom he reckoned ;

Let him call you 'Joseph,' let me come second."

Benjamin went in Joseph's stead.

Israel's tears were on Benjamin's head :

His son was living, who had been dead.

Israel touched with the hands of a lover

The body of Benjamin, over and over,

And the smell of his son was the smell of clover.

He held Benjamin close to his heart.

Joseph, watching them, stood apart,

Till his father's voice went forth like a dart:

“A fire trampled learns not to smolder—

Is the son I so strove to forget no older

Than when he reached to his father's shoulder?”

Where was the stone of the house of Zion,

On Israel's tree the cherished scion?

But Joseph struck down his fear like a lion.

Israel's heart was as burning tow,

For his arms were fast around Joseph now,

His bough by a fountain, his fruitful bough.

## DIALOGUE

“**Y**OU shall put on corruption like a  
dress,”

The Spirit, scornful of the Body, said,  
And smiled its lipless smile. “When once you  
bed

With the last lover of all men’s mistresses,  
Then you shall blot your nightgown’s finest  
thread—

Yourself will crawl from your fastidiousness.

“These eyes wherewith you look upon dark  
sheaves

Whetted by evening gold—these eyes will  
break;

Of this tongue death will eat, and it will take  
The subtle wrist, this brow that frowns and  
grieves,  
And your tranced mother and your child will  
quake  
To touch the shameful vacant thing it leaves.”

The Body listened to its tenant, sighed,  
But nothing said, until, taking the glass,  
It asked, “And when this that I am shall pass,  
Where will you stay to see me crucified?  
Will you share that blind cold below the grass?”  
And shook, to hear the cry the Spirit cried.



### III. SONNETS





## PERNEB'S TOMB

“**U**PON these stones Time broke his  
teeth,” you said.

We stood in Perneb's tomb, and stared upon  
The hammered blocks that held the royal dead  
Whose pomp still stood, although his breath  
was gone.

You said, “Slaves sweated for that narrow  
room.”

Their scattered bones are mixed with desert  
sand;

But on the high walls, ruddy in the gloom,  
The files of the king's servitors yet stand.

We shall not rear to death such monuments  
With massive marble, nor with crimson chalk.  
Nor wrap our withered limbs in cerements  
More spicy than our rare ephemeral talk.  
So Time, who broke his teeth upon these stones,  
Gnaws at our hearts, careless of Perneb's bones.

## ARMISTICE

**G**RIM darkness broods above the stricken  
earth,

Still as old terror swooping from the sky;

The nets of death are wrenched apart and lie

Across the meadows, barbed with savage mirth.

More dread than war, peace stares upon her

dearth

With the dead eyes of her insanity.

This hungry peace, that does not live or die,

Smiling at the vain victory of birth.

There is no scent of dawn, no sea-wind blowing

To sweep away this ancient evil grief.

The world is sick : simple desire is going ;  
Power lames wisdom ; love is but a thief.  
Nothing is here worth suffering and knowing  
But the sharp moment, profitless and brief.

## MEGALOSAURUS

**A** MONSTER like a mountain, leathern-  
limbed,

With eyes of sluggish ore and claws of stone,  
He heaved his thunder-throated body, rimmed  
By marsh-fires human eyes have never known.

A monolith carved out of savage night,  
He hid in his impenetrable hide  
Muscle and blood and nerves to sense delight  
And agony that tore him when he died.

The clumsy terror of his frame has gone  
The way of his blind, simple savagery.

Out of his casual bones men build the dawn  
That bore and bred such brutish game as he.  
But still endures his dull, confounding shape :  
In wars of the wise offspring of the ape.

## IN AUGUST

**H**EAT urges secret odors from the grass.  
Blunting the edge of silence, crickets  
shrill.

Wings veer, inane needles of light, and pass;  
Laced pools: the warm wood-shadows ebb and  
fill.

The wind is casual, loitering to crush  
The sun upon his palate, and to draw  
Pungence from pine, frank fragrances from  
brush,  
Sucked up through thin grey boughs as through  
a straw.

Moss-green, fern-green, and leaf- and meadow-  
green

Are broken by the bare, bone-colored roads,  
Less moved by stirring air than by unseen  
Soft-footed ants and meditative toads.

Summer is passing, taking what she brings :  
Green scents and sounds, and quick ephemeral  
wings.



## OR NOT TO BE

**S**HALL man go earthward willingly at last,  
Wearied with all that passionate flesh and  
brain

Suffered and wrought? Shall he rejoice to cast  
Behind him the bright vesture of his pain?

O wayward heart, the graves whereon you  
plant

Your cities and your corn, keep, every one,  
The peace you seek : not to be bruised by want  
Again, and by no hope to be undone.

Yet for this brief incredible hour you hold  
What all these dead must lack, as you shall, too :

A mere salt breath of sea, the drowsy gold  
Of bees' notes, the star-prescient chill of dew—  
Will never such a slight and silent thing  
Spill from the cup of your relinquishing?

## LITHUANIAN AUTUMN

**E**ARTH angular, contorted by the plow;  
Dulled stubble spread for the benignant  
herd;

Snow-breaks of balsam, welcoming no bird  
Save for a flapping crow, like some black vow;  
Huts under unkempt thatch, huddled to bear  
The burden of the sky to the year's end;  
A peasant making fire; at the bend,  
Birches like white-bodied girls with ruddy hair.

The patient woods, denuded and enchanted,  
Grown quiet as the throats of slumbrous  
doves:

Purple dissolving kindled greens and mauves.  
Beyond the velvet peat the fields are haunted.  
And, where the sombre tides of winter push  
Across the muted land : the burning bush.

## LENINGRAD

UPON his Finnish rock, curled like a  
wave,

Peter, throned over Neva, watches still

The granite flower of his granite will,

Sprung from that swamp only men's lives could  
pave.

Stone holds a street stern as an empty nave;

And, as though stained by some forgotten kill,

An arch like the red mouth of a great cave

Yawns on red wall, red pillar, and red sill.

Neva is a white beast with glittering fangs,

Imprisoned in a trap of iron cold,

And while she cries, copper on copper clangs:

The bells would give the sky their prayers to  
hold.

But like one crucified, the dead sky hangs,  
Impaled upon a spire of cruel gold.

## TO A SILENT MAN

WORDS are like mirrors where a swift  
fire glows,

Quick with soft colors, but as stripped of heat  
As though it had changed to flowers, as though  
it beat

On sea-cool floors in citron waves and rose :  
Pure, perfect flame that flies and falls and flows  
In silent rhythms as of streaming feet  
Treading the broken nets of incomplete  
Patterns which running radiance overthrows.

Yet all this fiery gesturing is cold  
As the pale glass that is its unmoved bed.

Fire cannot give the mirror warmth to hold.  
Only the glamour lives, the heat is shed.  
Here are no words, then. Take no light that  
    chills,  
But the dumb heat of locked volcanic hills



## IN DURANCE

**I**'LL dig under the earth soured with death  
And ask the munching worms if they were  
sired

By nobler than themselves, who, Troy being  
fired,

Grew fat on heroes, not on bones and breath.

I'll sound the weedy caverns of the seas

To find the carcass of Leviathan,

And of his leathern heart construct a man

Fit to endure such wintry years as these.

I'll climb the air to bring a vulture down,

Bid him pluck out the young buds' shuttered  
eyes,

Lest they should see the bloom; and where he  
flies

The dark will scream to give him bleak renown.

Alive or dead, uneasy I must lie

In this cracked world, that is as base as I.

#### IV. FOR ADAM



## PREVISION

**I** HOLD you now, cherished, inviolable  
As a pearl hidden in a close-locked shell,  
Tender as petals when the bud is folded,  
And quick with secret tremors as a bell.

I feed you on my heart, that no more stammers  
Or leaps or halts because of love's bright thorn;  
The blood runs coolly through my cradling body  
That you must tease and trample, yet unborn.

But, oh, my swinging bell, my pearl, my petal,  
My pain, my flesh, my bone that is not I—  
How shall I bear the stranger that you will be?  
How shall I live, knowing you too must die?

## MATERNITY

**I** MUST go all my days  
Softly as snow, whose wings  
Follow the hidden ways  
Of unimagined springs.

My stricken heart is caught  
In briers of surprise ;  
Its beats are hushed as thought,  
And eloquent as eyes.

I cry God pity them  
Whose joy is boisterous,  
Since I have touched the hem  
Of the miraculous.

## HEIRLOOM

**I**F words as hard as jewels  
I could string upon a chain  
With the colour of old gardens  
And the rivery voice of rain,  
Then when we laugh no longer,  
Nor cry, nor speak, nor hear,  
Perhaps the son of our son  
Would give it to his Dear.

## STRANGE FLOWER

**N**O faint hot smell of honey, drenching  
The giddy bees like velvet light ;

No mellow tang of apples, quenching

The cry for color in the night ;

No earthy smell of roots ; no dusky

Aroma sprung from wood fresh-cut ;

No black, bloom-covered grape grown musky ;

No breath from petals blindly shut ;

No sea-wind blown around the sunken

Green piles that knock against the pier—

Though on such perfumes men grow drunken

As upon danger, love or fear ;



Not these I crave, who stand here gaping  
At gardens, where I want but one  
Dear odor, clinging and escaping :  
The soft small scent of my small son.

## VENUS MATERNA

**T**HIS little body, smoother than a flower,  
The small strong limbs as petulant as  
flame—

These the lean years are waiting to devour,  
These will know chill and sweat and pain and  
shame.

Each sweet-fleshed curve and every tender  
hollow

Will hide in ugly clothing in disgrace,  
And she whose blood and bone you are, will  
follow

In vain the changes on your secret face.

Awhile yet you are hers, she need not doubt  
you,

And she may tend your needs and hush your  
cry,

And wonder whose the hands will be about you  
To lave and dress this body when you must die.

## APOCRYPHA

**W**HEN John the Baptist was so young  
That he had not yet learned to speak  
A syllable of his native tongue,  
The voice must have been shrill and weak  
Whereby his mother's heart was wrung.

When Jesus' fists uncurled to clutch  
The shavings in his father's beard,  
Before he learned to like to touch  
The screws and nails his mother feared,  
Small wandering hands had hurt her much.

When Judas was so frail a child

He sucked and slept, and little more—  
His mother, patient still, beguiled  
The baby she must needs adore.  
He shaped a kiss : all day she smiled.

## TO A CHILD

**Y**OU fly the black flag,  
Pirate!

Every lift of the billow is a shift of the scales  
Weighing your treasure.

No ship is safe from you, no sea.

Phœnician, Viking, common merchantman—

At last you will have them all,

Their burdens stowed in your hold,

Their gold

In which to wash your hands of duller things.

The wings of the sea-plane have already sung  
in your ears.

I have watched you, listening,  
Pirate—  
Child.

Yours are the wild years, the young years :  
Rough weather hazards, sweet and salt of strife.  
Yet they are mine, too,  
These years.

They will be a flock of wild geese  
Come to be fed from my hands.  
I hear them, "honk, honk,"  
I hear them coming  
Over the grey marshes of my life.

But how can I tell you  
What it will be like  
When the light is behind you,

When you are old,  
When the mountains have become hillocks,  
And even the well of tears has dried up,  
And I shall not be there to wait with you  
For death?



THE SOUL  
(After Herakleitos)

GO THOU

HER CHANGING ROADS.

KNOW ALL HER PROVINCES.

YET TO HER FAR FRONTIERS THOU WILT

NOT COME.

(1)



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